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## Officials present clean-water options

### STOPGAP SYSTEM SOUGHT FOR SOUTH COUNTY

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Faced with extensive perchlorate contamination that could take decades to clean, water officials Saturday outlined options for delivering clean drinking water to South County residents in the meantime.

The alternatives could cost \$2 million to \$150 million and could include installing under-the-sink gadgets in homes to filter out contamination or tapping more water from the state water project.

Officials with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Santa Clara Valley Water District presented the possibilities to more than 100 people who gathered at Gavilan College in Gilroy to learn more about perchlorate, its prevalence in the San Martin and Gilroy areas, and remedies.

``There is no one treatment system or treatment option that is undeniably the best system for every application," Kevin Mayer of the EPA told the crowd. ``Each one of them has pros and cons."

Perchlorate is a salt used as an oxidizer in making rocket fuel, highway safety flares, matches and fireworks. It has been linked to thyroid damage and is believed to be particularly dangerous to pregnant women and infants. It leached into the groundwater from the 13-acre site where Olin Corp. for decades produced highway flares. The chemical was discovered in South County more than two years ago.

Olin is responsible for cleaning up the contamination and paying those costs; however, officials said Saturday that it remains unclear who would have to pay for an interim solution.

As of Friday, perchlorate had been detected, mostly in small concentrations, in 401 of the 1,054 wells tested by the water district and an Olin consultant.

The 7.5-mile plume of contamination has spread to Morgan Hill and northern Gilroy.

Nearly 1,900 South County families are receiving bottled water from Olin or the water district.

Marc Lucca, a senior project manager, said the water district would like to narrow the six options down to one after consulting with regulators and community members. However, there is not a specific timeline for choosing a route.

Lucca said the possibilities are:

- Importing water from the Central Valley Project and Anderson Reservoir for household and agricultural use. This would require building a new water treatment plant, storage tanks and distribution pipelines. However, there are limitations on the use of this water, especially in dry years. Capital costs are projected at \$150 million, and the plan would take four to five years.
- Building a treatment and distribution system for the existing groundwater. Start-up costs are anticipated at \$135 million, and the plan would also take four to five years.

- Installing under-the-sink -- or so-called point-of-use -- treatment systems for groundwater used in homes. This option does not address agricultural water needs, and homeowners would have to maintain the systems. Capital costs would be about \$2 million, and the plan would take one to two years.
- Using point-of-use treatment for homes and wells -- providing safe water for household use and agriculture. This would involve complicated equipment that would cost residents more to use and maintain. Start-up costs are expected to be \$13 million to \$15 million. The plan would take a year or two.
- Relying on under-the-sink treatment for household use and buying treated wastewater for agricultural use. This would entail building new tanks and pipelines to deliver the recycled water. The capital cost is pegged at \$135 million, and the plan would take three to five years.
- Adding point-of-use treatment to wellheads for household and agricultural use, which would entail higher energy and maintenance costs for users. The start-up cost would be about \$30 million, and the plan would take a year or two.

The plans that call for treating groundwater could remove perchlorate in one of three ways: using ``nano-filters'' that separate perchlorate from water; employing bacteria that are encouraged to devour the contaminant; or using resin beads that grab the perchlorate out of the water.

San Martin resident Leslie Gadsby, whose well has tested positive for perchlorate contamination, was glad to hear the options but still had concerns after the meeting.

``It seems very far off and you never know," she said. ``When you do something like this, doesn't it always boil down to what costs the least amount of money? It's very discouraging."

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